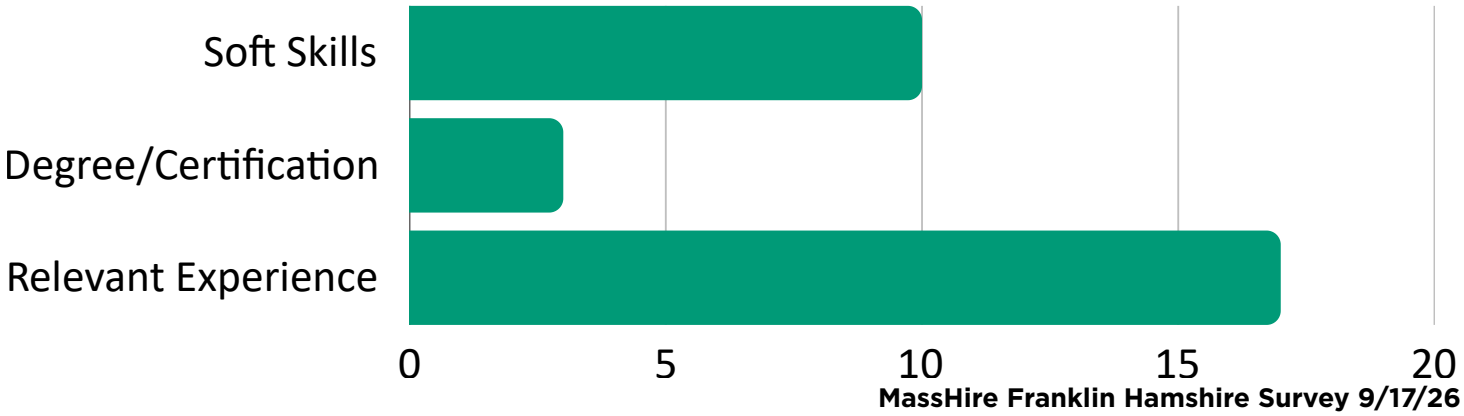
The Rise of Soft Skills

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In today's rapidly evolving labor market it can be difficult to identify which skills employers are prioritizing now and will be prioritizing into the future. Many of these shifts are rooted in the rapid technological advancement that has been occuring globally across all major industries. While these rapid changes are creating challenges, they provide opportunity for individuals and entities who best position themselves to successfully navigate the changes.

What are Employers Looking for Most?



MassHire Franklin Hamshire Survey 9/17/26

MassHire Franklin Hampshire surveyed 30 employers from various industries across the region to learn more about their recent recruitment activity. From the survey responses 10 of the 30 employers identified soft skills as the most important quality when looking for potential employees. Soft skills are "general abilities (such as communication, critical thinking, and adaptability) that rely on qualitative experiences and intuitive learning rather than technical expertise" (Merriam-Webster). Comparatively, only 3 of the 30 employers identified a degree or certificate as the most important quality when looking for potential employees. The remaining employers ranked relevant work experience as the most important factor. Work ethic, time management, and flexibility were some of the soft skills that were specifically identified. While soft skills may not trump years of relevant working experience, these intangible skills could be the deciding factor for an employer deciding between multiple candidates. This is especially relevant for younger job seekers or job seekers interested in entry level positions. These candidates have not yet accumulated the years of relevant experience needed for more advanced positions in their field of interest; however, advanced soft skills may give them the edge that employers are looking for and provide them the opportunity to get their foot in the door.

MassHire Programs & Services are funded in full by US Department of Labor (USDOL) Employment and Training Administration grants. (Additional details furnished upon request.)

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Beyond the results of this survey, evidence of the prioritization of soft skills can be seen in job postings from across the region. Over the past 10 years, communication, customer service, and management have consistently ranked in the top three most commonly desired skills listed in job postings in both the Franklin Hampshire Region and the State of Massachusetts (Lightcast '26). Several other, less prevalent, soft skills have increased dramatically in the past five years: Problem solving, teamwork, and professionalism. The presence of these skills increased by over 100% during that time frame. The consistent, sustained presence of these soft skills suggest that job seekers who show strength in these skills may be more marketable and have greater ease adjusting to the ever-evolving labor market.

Top "Desired Skills" Seen in Job Postings in the Franklin Hampshire Region

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
1	Communication	Communication	Communication	Communication	Communication
2	Customer Service	Customer Service	Customer Service	Customer Service	Customer Service
3	Management	Management	Management	Management	Operations
4	Operations	Operations	Operations	Operations	Management
5	Detail Oriented	Planning	Detail Oriented	Detail Oriented	Leadership
6	Sales	Leadership	Leadership	Leadership	Detail Oriented
7	Leadership	Detail Oriented	Sales	Sales	Sales
8	Planning	Sales	Planning	Nursing	Problem Solving

Franklin Hampshire WDA and State of MA Job Posting Activity per Lightcast.io, October 2026

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While hard skills or technical skills are still critical to the success of job seekers and employees, some of these skills are less emphasized in job postings due to the implementation of new technologies and a shifting labor market. Over the past five years, Javascript, the most commonly used programming language, and Adobe Photoshop, the most commonly used Graphic Design software, have become less prevalent in the desired skills sections of job postings dropping by greater than 60% both in the Franklin Hampshire Region and across the state of Massachusetts (Lightcast '26). Broader technical skills such as computer literacy, word processing, and spreadsheets have begun to see milder declines over this same time period. These declines are likely due to a combination of factors such as technological advancement and economic shifts. Regardless of the cause, the result has been that soft skills desirability has persisted, if not increased, through the evolving labor market while some hard skills or technical skills have become less desirable.

Skills Change Seen in Job Postings

"Desired Skill" seen in job postings	Percent Change In Massachusetts Sept '21 - Sept '26	Percent Change in Franklin Hampshire Sept '21 - Sept '26
Javascript	**-63%**	**-94%**
Adobe Photoshop	**-70%**	**-90%**
Adobe Illustrator	**-68%**	**-89%**
Communication	**+19%**	**+57%**
Leadership	**+53%**	**+73%**
Operations	**+51%**	**+65%**

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The labor market of 2026 is presenting challenges to both employers and job seekers. While technological advancements have induced rapid change, threatening to leave many job seekers behind, the best way forward may be a more human-focused approach. Soft skills such as communication, critical thinking, and creativity are what separate the job seeker from the technology that they are utilizing. By honing and highlighting these skills, job seekers can give themselves a leg up in navigating this ever-evolving labor market with human skills that have stood the test of time.

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The numbers in the above report reflect information from various data sets originating from multiple sources. Some of these numbers are projections and are not exact.

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